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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER
SUBJECT: Message from Mr. Ladd, Phnom Penh

In response to a query from General Haig, Mr. Ladd has forwarded his views on irresponsible news reporting from Phnom Penh, commented on the military situation in Cambodia and warmly endorsed a visit from General Haig.

Although I recommend you read Mr. Ladd's cable in its entirety, it makes the following points:

-- Mr. Wheeler of Associated Press and Mr. Foster of Scripps Howard, both stationed in Phnom Penh, are apparently the worst violators of objective reporting on the Cambodian situation. Ladd suggests they have become prophets of doom for the following reasons:

1. They do not have all the facts.
2. They are not qualified observers.
3. They carry residual resentment on the entire U.S. effort in Cambodia (and in Vietnam).
4. In May and June they predicted imminent collapse and now seek to exploit every negative factor they can uncover to justify their earlier misjudgments.
5. Ladd considers them sick, both mentally and physically, and states that some of their more responsible associates share these judgments.

-- Ladd goes on to outline difficulties currently being experienced by Cambodian forces and attributes much of them to their limited equipage and training and to their lack of experience at the battalion and brigade level.

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Nevertheless, Ladd makes the point that from a disastrous beginning in May and June they have held the enemy reasonably at bay and are improving steadily. Ladd cautions against any unwarranted optimism in view of the restraints under which we are operating but reiterates that he is encouraged about Cambodia's ability to weather through.

Ladd warmly welcomes General Haig's proposed visit. Haig now plans to depart Washington on Friday, December 11. He will spend two days in Cambodia, three days in South Vietnam and, en route to Washington, meet with Admiral McCain in Hawaii. I will provide you with more details on his trip by separate memorandum.

Attachment

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3 December 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig
Deputy Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

The following message (Phnom Penh 414) from Mr. Ladd for
Brigadier General Haig was received this morning, 3 December 1970:

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"To: Brig. Gen. Haig, The White House

"From: Mr. Ladd, Phnom Penh 414

"1. I know full well the pressures of irresponsible news reporting under which you must labor. Wheeler and all of the other U.S. newsmen are briefed on a background basis every Thursday afternoon by the Ambassador. From time to time I participate in these briefings and on a time consuming almost daily basis am privately interviewed by individual newsmen. The newsmen also occasionally travel to some nearby field unit and talk to local FANK commanders. The journalists draw their own conclusions from their relatively limited observations and write according to what I suppose they consider a profound analysis.

"2. In my own case, I draw my conclusions from 30 years of study and professional military and academic association with the Far East in general and during the past ten years, Indochina in particular. I also have access to a great deal more pertinent and timely information than do the journalists to include intelligence, logistics, training, FANK plans, FANK assets, etc. I have never been "optimistic" nor have I "long insisted the war was going favorably for the Cambodians" as I understand Jim Foster of Scripps Howard recently reported. That may be one journalist's interpretation of my analysis of facts as I see them but it is just that -- his interpretation colored by his own views and coast (sic) in opposition to his own.

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"3. Certainly you must be aware that there are some journalists here who would like nothing more than to see this U.S. effort in Cambodia fail and to make Mr. Nixon appear foolish. Fortunately, those who feel that way in a dedicated sense are relatively few. Unfortunately, most of them live here in Phnom Penh and partially because of their datelines and emotional accounts seem to get banner play at home. On several occasions I have told you of their irresponsible conduct both professionally and personally. A review of my message file to you will verify this. At first I believed I might be able to get through to them in some small way to give them a more objective picture of what is actually going on in Cambodia. Those men simply do not care even to think objectively much less write objectively.

"4. I believe the Wheeler, Foster and other prophet-of-doom stories vary so drastically from the Ambassador's official assessment and my previous report to you because:

"a. The writers do not have access to all of the information necessary to make a responsible military assessment of the over-all situation in Cambodia.

"b. The writers are not professionally qualified to make an objective military analysis of the over-all situation in Cambodia.

"c. For reasons of their own, unknown to me, the writers carry a residual resentment to the entire U.S. effort in Cambodia (and in Vietnam) and seek in every possible way to discredit any U.S. success in this endeavor.

"d. In the earlier days of May and June these writers predicted the imminent collapse of the poorly prepared Cambodian military forces and of the salvation government of Lon Nol. This did not happen and these men continue to seek every negative factor they can uncover to belittle, discredit and demean both FANK and the government.

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"e. Personally, I consider these single-minded disaster-oriented writers to be sick both mentally and physically and they are certainly doing a disservice to themselves, their profession and their country. Some of their more responsible professional associates agree with me on these points. The Ambassador also deplores their distortions of facts.

"5. I cannot cite evidence of deliberate distortions. They simply see every action, lack of action, event, statement, development and rumor in an entirely different light than I do, than the Ambassador does, than the DATT does and than

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"6. I wrote the Ambassador's assessment which then became a country team paper. Therefore, I shall not attempt to repeat it here. The enemy announced that he would take the offensive in early November. He makes this sort of announcement periodically, as you well know. He did launch an offensive in early November (after some eight weeks lull in enemy activity) and he managed in 24 hours to take and hold a short piece of road and to blow a bridge on Route 7. He also took the Pichnil Pass on Route 4. His major offensive ended with these two achievements. Other scattered attacks did take place throughout the countryside but none were particularly significant. It is my personal opinion that FANK forces on Routes 4 and 7 reacted to the enemy offensive rather poorly and are remiss for having lost control of both areas. Certainly they were and still are too slow in reopening those roads. FANK is not, however, a well-trained or experienced military force. The FANK units at any one point must react to the enemy as best they can. FANK does have a few reasonably capable units but if these units are not directly involved in a specific enemy action and happen to be employed elsewhere, FANK does not have the capability of disengaging them immediately or moving them rapidly to every brushfire. Also, as both the Ambassador and I have reported, FANK leadership at battalion and brigade level is lacking in professionalism, experience and confidence.

"7. In its own way, however, and in the face of difficulties most other forces that have fought the VC/NVA would consider insurmountable, FANK has managed to struggle from a situation

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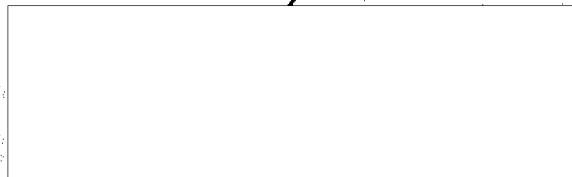
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considered to be almost hopeless in May and June to a position in which it can hold the enemy reasonably at bay and at the same time improve its own military posture on a steadily growing basis. I would be the last person to make any extravagant claims that FANK is comparable to a modern and efficient military force or that it should be expected to achieve feats of military brilliance. No one else should expect miracles of FANK. With our limited material assistance and their own courage, dedication and common sense, the Cambodians are a damn site better off today than they were six months ago. The government is non-communist and stronger than it was six months ago. There are no American military stationed in Cambodia other than the three working with me and the Attache group. There is a war going on here against a determined enemy aggressor force. With what has been provided to FANK and in strict conformance with the restraints placed upon our penny-ante operation here in Phnom Penh, I am encouraged, but not optimistic, that the mission you assigned to me is being achieved in accordance with the President's guidance.

"8. A visit from you would be most welcome. There are many matters I need to discuss with you and I am convinced your first-hand assessment of conditions here would be of great service to the President. I extend an invitation for you to stay with Betty and me. First we want you to be with us and second, if you are not staying with us I am sure I will be permitted very little time with you alone. It won't be a deliberate effort to isolate us but such is the fate of dignitaries who come this way. If it would be politically awkward for you to accept my invitation on the grounds of long standing personal friendship, I would appreciate your insistence on a few hours consultation with me while you are here. I shall await news of your trip through other channels. Why don't you bring Pat along with you? Regards.

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